

The unfinished memoirs: History revisited

MD. MATIUL ISLAM

THE unfinished memoirs of Sheikh Mujib are a vivid recollection and narration of history. They are the history of Sheikh Mujib's struggle for Pakistan under Muslim League banner, the post-liberation struggle to free Muslim League from the clutches of a few aristocrats, launching of the Awami League and finally routing of the Muslim League government in Dhaka in 1954 election under the banner of United Front. The memoirs ended here, but the struggle continued on issues of provincial autonomy, six-point programme and finally, independence of Bangladesh.

Sheikh Mujib's political mentor and guru was Mr. Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, whom he first met when Suhrawardy, as a minister in the Fazlul Huq cabinet, visited the missionary school in Gopalganj. This was the beginning of a long and close relationship which ended in 1963 when Sheikh Mujib received Suhrawardy's dead body at Dhaka airport and was its pall bearer to the grave. Mujib was openly critical of A.K. Fazlul Huq for forming Shayma-Huq government in Bengal and opposing creation of Pakistan. But Mujib's father made him promise that he would never personally attack Sher-e-Bangla. On Bhashani, with whom he and Shamsul Huq shared a cell in the Dhaka Central Jail, Mujib writes: "The three of us used to pray together and after Magrib prayer Moulana Bhashani would teach us about religion from the Quran. This became a routine but Mr. Huq was a bit of a problem since he seemed unable to finish any prayer in under an hour."

In 1956, Sheikh Mujib, as the minister in charge of commerce, labour and industries in Ataur Rahman Khan's cabinet, in a surprise move took over control of the management of Dhaka Electric Supply Company from Octivious Steel, a British company inducted by the previous government. Sheikh Mujib overnight created the much needed East Pakistan Small Industries Corporation and Film Development Corporation by securing funds from the central government.

Sheikh Mujib, after resigning as minister, visited USA under a Leadership Grant in December, 1957. His first stop was Boston and Munier Chowdhury and I received him at Logan Airport. Mujib had to undergo surgery in

Boston General Hospital where we took turns to look after him. He moved into Munier's small apartment for recuperation. It was here that I developed a close friendship with him which lasted until he was cruelly assassinated on this day 37 years ago. During his stay in Cambridge, Sheikh Mujib had a meeting with the Harvard Advisory Group consisting of Dean Mason, David Bell and Gus Papanek. David Bell later became the Budget Director and USAID Administrator under President Kennedy.

During my long association with Sheikh Mujib, I



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closely observed several traits of his character and the observations on various issues he made in his memoirs fully reflected his convictions:

- About Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, Mujib observed: "He wanted to be the prime minister not of a people but of a party. He had forgotten that a country could not be equated with any one political party."
- On the quality of leadership, Sheikh Mujib said: "When we have an unprincipled leadership at the

helm of affairs, we may make some progress for a while but such gains will vanish in times of crisis."

- On the killing of Ahmadiyas in Lahore in 1952, Mujib observed: "I know at least this much that no one shall be murdered because he holds views different from mine. That certainly was not what Islam taught and such an action was tantamount to a crime in the religion."
- On the role of Khawaja Nazimuddin during 1947 demarcation of boundary between India and Pakistan when Pakistan lost a number of Muslim majority territories, Mujib wrote: "The lesson in all these is that if leaders make mistakes it is the people who have to pay."
- On work ethics, Mujib writes: "When I decide on doing something, I go ahead and do it. If I find out that I was wrong, I try to correct myself. This is because I know that only doers are capable of making errors; people who never do anything make no mistake."

Mujib never betrayed or embarrassed his friends. On a visit to Lahore to organise Awami League party in 1950, he visited the Civil Service Academy to meet his friends who were under training in there. Sheikh Mujib never mentioned any name in his memoirs lest his friends were harassed by the government. In Chittagong in 1961, I met him at Kalurghat waiting for the ferry to take us across Karnafully. He declined my invitation to visit my home because he was a persona non grata to the government and could not embarrass the deputy commissioner.

Sheikh Mujib's life was one of constant sacrifices. He believed that "to do anything great, one has to be ready to sacrifice and show one's devotion. I believe that those who are not ready to sacrifice are not capable of doing anything worthy. To engage in politics in our country, one must be ready to make huge sacrifices to make our people happy."

Sheikh Hasina deserves praise for preserving and publishing Sheikh Mujib's memoirs. But now that she has presented the nation with Mujib's teachings, political philosophy and spirit of sacrifice, the burden is on her to instill those qualities in the Awami League leadership.

The writer was the first finance secretary under Sheikh Mujib.

He was of the people

SHAKHAWAT LITON

IN an interview with eminent writer Dr. Humayun Azad, which was published in "Robbar" on December 2, 1984, national professor and renowned political scientist Abdur Razzaq was asked to comment about the major highlights of politics in Bangladesh in the preceding one decade.

In reply Prof Razzaq said: "It is correct that the country's common people -- rickshaw pullers, slum dwellers -- used to feel more proud. They used to feel a little more strength during the time of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I clearly understand that now a large number of people feel helpless to a great extent; they did not feel so earlier. Gandhi or Jinnah were people's leaders, they were not part of the people. But during the time of Mujib people started to feel that Mujib was part of them. Now that situation does not exist."

Sheikh Mujib was a politician who had fallen in love with people, not with power. He struggled for the freedom of people and for this he had to suffer a lot. But he never compromised with any injustice. This is why he became the greatest leader in our history who could boldly pronounce: "I do not desire the office of prime minister. I wish to see the rights of the people of this country established."

He was never afraid of going to jail in the interest of his struggle for the freedom of his people. He was first sent to jail in 1948. He was arrested again in 1949 and was in jail up to 1952. He became a minister in 1954. Again he was arrested in 1954 and confined till 1955. He was arrested once more in 1958 by military dictator Ayub Khan. He was in prison for five years

and in internment for two years, and faced trials in many cases, including the Agartala Conspiracy case. He was arrested in 1966 and was in jail for about three years. He was again arrested by another military dictator, Yahya Khan, eventually emerging into freedom. In Mujib's own words: "Long struggle, long suffering. Not only I, but also many of my colleagues."

Referring to the secret trial in West Pakistan during the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971, British journalist David Frost, on January 18, 1972, asked Bangabandhu: "And when you see them digging a grave and you think of everything you will have to leave behind you, do you think of your country or of your wife and children first?"

Bangabandhu replied: "I feel for my country and my people and then my family. I love my people more. I suffered for my people and you have seen how my people love me."

It is true his people loved him wholeheartedly. There have been very few world leaders who have been adored as much by their people. The people fought in 1971 in Bangabandhu's name despite his absence from

the scene.

In the face of tremendous pressure from the international community, the Pakistan army could not kill him through a farcical trial. They tried to kill him in jail by creating a chaotic situation. Bangabandhu himself described the situation in the interview with David Frost: "They created a situation in the jail and mobilised some prisoners in the jail to attack me early in the morning and kill me. The officer who was in charge of me took a liking to me, I think. Perhaps he knew that Yahya Khan's days were numbered, and at 3 o'clock at night he took me out of the jail and kept me in his bungalow for two days without any military guards. After two days, he took me from there to another deserted area in a colony. There he kept me for four five or six days. Nobody knew where I was except some poor officers."



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When Yahya Khan was handing over power to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto he said: "Mr. Bhutto, I have made the greatest blunder by not killing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman" and suggested that Mujib should be hanged. But Bhutto refused to do so. Bhutto later told Bangabandhu about it.

As people across the globe expressed their solidarity with the Bangladeshi people and their struggle for independence in 1971, the world media strongly demanded the release of Bangabandhu. For example, an Italian newspaper, *l'Unita* (November 18, 1971), wrote: "The destiny of Mujibur Rahman, winner of the elections, jailed by the military leaders, symbolises the tragedy of the people of Pakistan. ... the first indispensable step, in order to be on time, is that all the peoples and all the states who love and want peace should obtain the immediate liberation of the Awami League leader, the heroic anti-fascist Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Time magazine (January 17, 1972), under the headline "Mujib's road from prison to power," also described how strong the mounting pressure

was. It wrote: "To some Western observers, the scene stirred thoughts of Pontius Pilate deciding the fate of Jesus and Barabbas. 'Do you want Mujib freed?' shouted Pakistan President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at a rally of more than 100,000 supporters in Karachi. The crowd roared its assent, as audiences often do when subjected to Bhutto's powerful oratory. Bowing his head, the president answered: 'You have relieved me of a great burden.'"

"Thus, last week Bhutto publicly announced what he had previously told *Time* Correspondent Dan Coggin: his decision to release his celebrated prisoner, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the undisputed political leader of what was once East Pakistan, and president of what is now independent Bangladesh," reported *Time*.

Conspirators took advantage of his unqualified love for the people. He could neither imagine nor believe that his own people could do any harm to him. It is an irony of fate that what the Pakistan military junta could not do, but in his independent Bangladesh, some disgruntled officers of the Bangladesh army did.

What has been the aftermath of the Bangabandhu killing? When he was put on secret military trial in West Pakistan in 1971, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant, warned that the secret trial for treason of Mujibur Rahman, absolute

leader of East Pakistan, could lead to more serious consequences than the hurricane which had devastated East Bengal in November 1970.

U Thant's warning was proved right after the assassination of Bangabandhu in independent Bangladesh. As Professor Razzaq observed, there has been a basic and fundamental change in the country's political situation. Bangladesh has been going through a disorderly journey since his assassination. Common people have become helpless to a great extent. Military officers have grabbed state power twice. The country was put under martial law for a long time. The cherished constitution was made subservient to martial law proclamations. Politics has become more complicated and confrontational. Secularism was deleted from the constitution. The constitutional bar on use of religion in politics was limited, allowing the rise of anti-liberation forces. Circumstances have become so complicated that people are hardly the focal point of politics any more.

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TRIBUTE

Brig. Gen. Jamil



ENAYETULLAH KHAN

IN the dawn of August 15, 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made one of his final phone calls to his military secretary Col. Jamil Uddin Ahmad. He had been attacked, Bangabandhu told Col. Jamil, and the residence on Road 32 was surrounded. Then the line went dead.

On a night when conspiracy was afoot and uncertainty gripped the city, and with the country's leadership seemingly paralysed, Col. Jamil did not shrink from doing his duty. He called senior officers, including the chief of army staff, Gen. Shafiullah, and told them to send in troops. He then ordered the Presidential Guard Regiment, charged to defend Bangabandhu, and headed for Road 32 immediately.

Calmly holstering his service revolver, Jamil tried to reassure his wife and children: "Bangabandhu is in danger. How can I not go?" "Look after my daughters," was his final request before he mounted his jeep and headed off into the darkness.

Arriving in front of Sobhanbagh mosque, Col. Jamil found that the PGR convoy had halted. He demanded to know the reason and was told that there were army units ahead and that there was gunfire. He tried to convince the troops to march forward. Then realising that time was running out, he got into his jeep and prepared to drive into Road 32 himself.

The valiant patriot was shot dead as he sat in his jeep and embraced martyrdom trying to save the leader whom he had, like many others, sworn to protect. It was the steadfast adherence to his principles that guided Col. Jamil in the final moments of his life. On a night when many brave souls hesitated, Jamil did not waver. It was the supreme test of courage and honour -- and he passed with flying colours.

It was not until about 2pm on August 16, 1975, that the family of Col. Jamil learnt anything definitive about his fate. A call came from Gen. Shafiullah, whom Col. Jamil had asked at dawn to send troops to Bangabandhu's rescue. Mrs. Jamil answered the phone and the chief of army choked as he broke the news of her husband's death. Bangladesh had lost a true patriot.

A man of extraordinary character, Col. Jamil had been held hostage in Pakistan during the Liberation War. But his integrity and professionalism as a career army officer led him to be appointed military secretary to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in independent Bangladesh.

Gen. Shafiullah, who had trained with Jamil at the Pakistan Military Academy, had this to say when remembering his slain comrade many years later: "Jamil Bhai, myself and the few Bangali officers who were in Pakistan in those days had a regular liaison among ourselves. That was the time when Bangali nationalism was at its budding stage. As members of the majority of the population of Pakistan, we saw it the hard way how small our representations had been in the armed forces. Whenever we met, we used to talk about this. Jamil Bhai's sense of nationalism was the strongest among us and at times he would burst out in anger and desperation."

In 2010, Jamil was promoted posthumously to the rank of Brig. General and awarded the Bir Uttam in recognition of his valour as he was killed trying to save Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib on the fateful morning of August 15, 1975. That the recognition was so late in coming is a sign of the polarisation of our country, where even supreme acts of courage and sacrifice are seen through the lens of partisanship. For the nation, it's a belated reminder of the man's greatness. And it also is a time to reflect on what the actions of this true hero meant to Bangladesh's history in general.

"Jamil's soul will be in peace and I will also die in peace," Jamil's eldest daughter Tehmina Enayet said. "My father was an honest officer. I'm proud that my father sacrificed his life for such a great leader."

Brig Gen. Jamil's deeds outlive his mortal existence. He answered his country's call and did not hesitate to lay down his life in the line of duty. When the nation stood at a crossroads, Brig. Gen. Jamil displayed the moral courage that marks a great soldier and a true hero.

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